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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT BEHAVIOR AND ACHIEVEMENT OF INNER CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN.

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TO DETERMINE WHAT KINDS OF PARENT BEHAVIOR ARE RELATED TO THE SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT OF INNER CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN, 32 HIGH ACHIEVERS AND 32 LOW ACHIEVERS IN THIRD AND FOURTH GRADE WERE SELECTED AND INTERVIEWS WERE COLLECTED FROM THEIR MOTHERS. THE INTERVIEW CONSISTED OF 123 FIXED RESPONSE QUESTIONS. TO ESTIMATE THE VALIDITY OF THE MOTHERS' RESPONSES, A MODIFIED QUESTIONNAIRE WAS ADMINISTERED TO THE CHILDREN. THE STUDY FOUND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MOTHERS OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT AND LOW ACHIEVEMENT CHILDREN ON 17 ITEMS. DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND ON (1) SUCH ITEMS AS HELPING CHILDREN SAVE MONEY AND STAMPS, PLAYING SPORTS, ATTENDING CHURCH, TALKING ABOUT THE NEWS, TALKING ABOUT THE FAMILY, AND GOING TO A PARADE, (2) SCHOOL ITEMS LIKE TALKING ABOUT SCHOOL AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, ATTEMPTING TO FIND OUT WHY CHILDREN DO POORLY AND CORRECTING THEIR WORK, DESIRING CHILDREN TO GO TO COLLEGE, AND REQUIRING THAT CHILDREN DO WELL IN SCHOOL, (3) ITEMS RELATED TO READING (READING ALOUD AT HOME, PARENTS READING MAGAZINES, AND MOTHERS' READING); AND (4) ITEMS HAVING TO DO WITH MOTHERS' INITIATIVE IN CONFERRING WITH SCHOOL OFFICIALS. THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY INDICATE THAT THERE IS AN APPARENT POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT AND THESE FACTORS OF PARENTAL ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE 1967 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION IN NEW YORK CITY ON FEBRUARY 18, 1967. (DK)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT BEHAVIOR AND ACHIEVEMENT OF INNER CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what specific kinds of parent behavior are related to the scholastic achievement of inner city elementary school children.

General Plan of the Investigation

The general plan of the study involved four steps. First, samples of 32 high achievers and 32 low achievers were selected from third and fourth graders attending an inner city elementary school in Detroit. Second, an interview schedule was developed for the assessment of parents' behavior. Third, the mothers of the children comprising the high and low achiever samples were interviewed.

The final step was the analysis of data to determine which of the specific kinds of parent behavior investigated were significantly related to the children's scholastic achievement.

Procedures

The selection of the high and low achiever samples was based on standardized achievement test scores and scholastic aptitude test scores for 241 third and fourth graders.

The achievement test for most of the children was the California Achievement Test, Primary Battery; for some of the fourth graders it was the Iowa Test of

Basic Skills. The aptitude test for most of the children was the Detroit Primary Learning Aptitude Test; for some third graders it was the Detroit Beginning First Grade Intelligence Test. All test scores were converted to percentile equivalents and the difference, achievement percentile minus aptitude percentile, was obtained for each child. On the basis of these differences, the 241 children were rank ordered from highest degree of overachievement to highest degree of underachievement. The criteria of eligibility for selection to the samples were that the child had attended the school for at least eight months; that he lived with his natural mother; and that the mother was available for interviewing. The children selected for the high achiever sample were the highest ranking 32 children on the rank ordered list who met these criteria. Those selected for the low achiever sample were the lowest ranking 32 who met the criteria. The high achievers were selected entirely from the highest quartile in the rank ordered list, and the low achievers were all in the lowest quartile.

The parent interview schedule included 123 questions which were designed to determine the extent to which parents had engaged in many kinds of behavior considered to have a potential influence on children's achievement in school. Most of the questions were of the fixed response type and were structured to measure the frequency with which parents had practiced specific behaviors. Several open end questions were included where more flexibility of response was desired. Although only mothers were interviewed, the questions asked about behavior of both fathers and mothers.

After the interview schedule was pretested and revised, the mothers of the 32 high achievers and 32 low achievers were interviewed personally by the investigator. All interviews were conducted at the homes of the respondents. The interviews ranged from 40 minutes to one and one-half hours in duration.

The analysis of data was basically a matter of determining whether the parents of high achievers and the parents of low achievers differed significantly with respect to each of the types of behavior investigated. The chi-square test was applied to the data for each separate interview question to see if the differences between the responses of parents of high and low achievers were statistically significant. Differences at or below the 5 per cent probability for chance occurance were considered statistically significant.

In order to obtain an estimate of the validity of the mothers' responses to interview questions a questionnaire was administered to the children in the samples by their teachers. This questionnaire consisted of slightly modified versions of ten of the parent interview questions. Comparisons were made between each child's responses and the responses of his mother. Results showed that in general the mothers reported slightly higher incidences of those parent behaviors examined than did their children, but that differences, in this respect, between high achievers' mothers and low achievers' mothers were very small and not statistically significant. This finding provided some evidence that differences found between the parents of high achievers and those of low achievers, with respect to behaviors, were not due to either group of mothers having a greater tendency to exaggerate in reporting their behaviors.

Findings

The findings of the study indicated that the high achievers' parents and the low achievers' parents differed significantly with respect to 17 of the 123 specific behaviors investigated. In every case the high achievers reported more or greater frequency of the behavior.

In the area of provision of experiences for children 46 specific behaviors were investigated. The six which showed significant differences were the following:

1. Helping children save money or purchase saving stamps,
2. Playing outdoor games or sports with children,
3. Attending church with children,
4. Talking with children about parents' lives before the children were born,
5. Talking with children about matters in the news,
6. Taking children to a parade.

Of 38 specific behaviors relating to parental interest taken in children's school activities, five showed significant differences. These were:

1. Talking with children about the kind of work children were doing at school,
2. Talking with children about special activities at school,
3. Attempting to find the reason for poor work and helping the child correct it when he did a poor job on a schoolwork assignment,
4. Desiring that children go to college,
5. Requiring for their satisfaction that children attain high marks in school.

In the general category of parent behavior considered related to the development of children's interests in reading, 13 specific behaviors were investigated. The four which showed significant differences were:

1. Having children read aloud to their parents,
2. Asking children to tell their parents about stories the children had read,
3. Mothers' reading to themselves at home,
4. Parents' reading of magazines at home.

There were 14 behaviors investigated in the area of parent contacts with school personnel and participation in school-sponsored activities. The two showing significant differences were:

1. Conferring with the school principal or assistant principal,
2. Taking the initiative in requesting conferences with the principal or assistant principal.

Twelve specific kinds of behavior were examined which concerned motivation and control of children's behavior. None of these differentiated the high and low achievers' parents to an extent which was statistically significant.

Conclusion

These findings support a conclusion that the scholastic achievement of inner city elementary school children appears to be positively related to (1) the amount of interest taken by parents in children's school activities, (2) the extent to which parents encourage children's interest in reading, (3) the level of parents' aspirations for their children's educational attainments, (4) the extent to which parents share experiences with children, and (5) the extent of parental communication with school personnel.

Implications

In recent years, educators have been devoting greater attention to efforts to improve the learning of disadvantaged children. Federal and state funds have been expanded greatly to finance varied approaches to the problem. This study provides further evidence of the impact of the behavior of parents on the educational achievement of their children. The implication then is that elementary school teachers and administrators in inner city areas should do everything in their power to encourage and to facilitate the kinds of parent behavior found in this study and in similar research to be significantly related to children's scholastic achievement.